

**Forest Service**

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News Release

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Forest Service Pauses Trail Realignment Project to Reengage Public

(July 7, 2015) Marion, VA - The USDA Forest Service is taking a step back from trail realignment efforts on the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area in Smyth, Grayson, Wythe, and Carroll counties, Virginia. “We realize we must do a better job of engaging our trail users on this project,” states Beth Merz, Area Ranger. “We’ll take some time to refocus our efforts to understand the public’s needs and rebuild relationships with trail users, adjacent landowners, and local communities. It will be a long road, but it is important to us to find a way we can work together to find solutions and opportunities.”

“I applaud the Forest Service for stepping back to reengage the trail users,” states Congressman Morgan Griffith. “The trail system is an integral part of our community and regional tourism efforts. It is important to work together to make the trail system a success.”

The fieldtrips and additional workshops planned for this summer will not take place. Instead, Area Ranger Beth Merz will meet with individuals, groups, county and tourism officials, to learn more about what is important to trail users, how the trails are used, what types of trails and trail lengths are preferred, access needs to the trail system, and any other ideas, issues, and concerns. This information can inform future inventories and improvements to the trail system. “I will be reaching out to people I know have an interest in the trail system and I invite anyone who has ideas, questions, or concerns to contact me,” states Merz.

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“Many trail users are concerned about whether we will be giving tickets for riding non-system or historic trails while we take this step back,” reflects Merz. “In the future, I hope we can work together to develop a trail inventory and assessment which will identify those trails to remain in the system. Until the inventory and assessment is complete, we do not plan to issue citations for riding on non-system or historic trails.”

To contact Ranger Merz or for more information on the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area trail system, please call (276) 783-5196 or toll free at 1-800-628-7202.

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